

West Germany

The Spies Who Came In From the Cold

BONN—"The Federal Republic is an El Dorado for spies," Helmut Schmidt, the Social Democratic parliamentary leader in West Germany, said last Thursday. His comment followed the opening of a Federal investigation of the country's three espionage services.

It was "spy time" in West Germany again.

There are many reasons for the West German "El Dorado." One is that Germany is a divided nation. One-third of the 60-million West Germans have relatives in Communist East Germany. Some of them are blackmailed into spying. Others are lured by money. Still others are professionals. The official estimate is that East Germany has 5,000 spies operating here.

In addition, West Germany is the richest, most exposed, technically advanced country facing East Europe, and it has the heaviest concentration of allied weaponry on its territory: a natural target for espionage.

Combatting the Eastern spies are legions of American, British, French, and German agents. The German organizations consist of the Military Screen Service (MAD) in Bonn, the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) in Munich and the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution (BVS).

The aim of the probe of the intelligence services is to ascertain any loopholes in their

operations. In recent weeks there has been a string of bizarre "spy" incidents that have made West Germany look bad—or at least clumsy for the moment.

Headlines in several West German newspapers have asked, "Have the secret services broken down?" A cartoonist depicted some Kremlin spymasters opening up an airfreight crate and discovering Bonn's Defense Minister, Gerhard Schröder, inside.

Since mid-October not a day has passed without disclosures of suspected or confirmed espionage cases.

There was Rear Adm. Hermann Lüdke whose miniature camera snaps of secret NATO documents were apprehended by a Bonn photo laboratory technician. Military counterintelligence operatives questioned him and searched his house; but Bonn police officials failed to get the Federal prosecutor's office in Karlsruhe to make a decision whether to arrest Lüdke.

On Oct. 8, the admiral was found shot to death, possibly a suicide, in the nearby Eifel Mountains. Authorities say there is no certainty that Lüdke was a major spy, only a "suspicion." But there is certainty that somebody bungled the investigation, and the various investigating authorities are blaming each other.

There was also the case of the missing missile: A year ago a Sidewinder air-to-air rocket was stolen from the Zell Air

Base in Bavaria. Last week it was revealed that it had been filched by a high-living starfighter pilot, a Polish-born mechanic and an architect who managed to get it to Russian hands. The Federal prosecutor, Ludwig Martin, boasted that their identification and arrest was a "masterpiece of criminal detection."

Another blunder was reported by a Western allied espionage source. He said six known East German agents had been forewarned of being under surveil-

Missing Missile

The case of the missing Sidewinder rocket, as disclosed in West Germany last week, was as bizarre a spy incident as you could find. Officials said two men climbed a fence to get into the base arsenal, trundled the 165-pound missile on a wheelbarrow through a hole cut in the barbed-wire barrier, and loaded the weapon into a waiting car.

The two men, joined by a third man, drove hundreds of miles with the 10-foot rocket wrapped in a carpet, its nose sticking out the car window. Later they broke it down into sections and airfreighted it to Moscow in a special case and a suitcase.

lance and succeeded in last-minute escapes to East Berlin. The source said their cover had been blown by impatient West German espionage officials who insisted on arresting one spy and then blabbed the fact that a "double agent" in the employ of a Western allied secret service has fingered the suspect.

Still awaiting clarification at the end of the week were the October suicides of five Federal employees, including the deputy chief of the Federal Intelligence Service and an army colonel; the arrest of a Defense Ministry secretary on suspicion of espionage; and the three-day interrogation by counterspies of Otakar Svercina, the chief Bonn correspondent of the Czechoslovak press agency, Ceteka.

These incidents suggest a weakness in the espionage agencies. That is a desire among several intelligence officials to make themselves look good and their Western competitors correspondingly bad. Hence some of the astonishing publicity.

However, for the country as a whole, the latest scandals have tended to create an international image of unreliability. Nothing could serve the Communist powers better. Official Bonn is hoping, therefore, that the Federal probe will strengthen Western confidence in West Germany.

—DAVID BINDER